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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0638
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUALA LUMPUR 000158

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FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: FINAL PUSH BEFORE MALAYSIA'S ELECTION DAY

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 154 - CLEAN FINGERS DIRTY ELECTION?

[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 140 - CAMPAIGN UNDER WAY

[1](#)C. KUALA LUMPUR 90 - ELECTION PRIMER

[1](#)D. KUALA LUMPUR 95 - ELECTION DATE SET

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF MARK D. CLARK, REASON 1.4 (B AND D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Malaysia's national election campaign will conclude at midnight on March 7. Polling booths will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. on March 8. Local election officials will quickly announce results in their respective districts, and almost all races should be known by midnight March 8. The ruling National Front (BN) coalition made a final push for Chinese and Indian votes in the last day of campaigning before Malaysia's March 8 national elections. BN warned that ethnic minorities will lose their voice in government if voters desert the National Front's Chinese and Indian parties. The opposition Islamist party PAS held a pre-dawn prayer gathering on March 7 to call for divine intervention to keep PAS-controlled Kelantan state out of the hands of the dominant United Malays National Organization (UMNO). Lacking access and money to get their message out via the pro-BN television, radio and the mainstream press, opposition parties have focused on nightly rallies (ceramahs) to reach voters. By comparison, BN and UMNO held very few ceramahs, but relied on heavy utilization of the media as well as neighborhood organizing. March 6 evening ceramahs in Kuala Lumpur revealed the tremendous disparity in resources available to BN, which put on a multi-media extravaganza, and to the opposition, which barely managed to keep the microphone on but nevertheless drew in thousands of would-be voters. PAS supporters in Terengganu on March 7 intercepted nine buses suspected of carrying illegitimate voters shipped in to swing tight races in BN's favor, and PAS leaders in Kelantan warned of citizens arrests of such "phantom" voters on polling day. Malaysia's election campaign has played out in a peaceful and orderly manner. Opposition voices, however, have already begun to speak about protest actions in the event they lose races due to perceived fraud. Protests of some kind would appear likely should PAS lose control of Kelantan under circumstances of voter fraud. End Summary.

March 8 Polling Hours Away; Results Expected Quickly

[1](#)2. (SBU) The National Front (Barisan Nasional, BN) and opposition parties complete their campaigning today, with all campaign activities to stop by midnight March 7 in accordance with election laws. Polling centers will open on March 8 at 8:00 a.m. and must close at 5:00 p.m. Constituency-level

election officials will announce results for their districts, with initial results expected at around 8.00 p.m. The results of almost all races should be known by midnight March 18. Embassy observer teams remain in the field.

BN Makes Final Push for Minority Votes

13. (SBU) BN focused heavily on the minority Chinese and Indian votes in the final 24-hours of the campaign. Prime Minister Abdullah and other senior BN leaders warned the Chinese and Indians that their communities would no longer have a voice or representation in government if they voted out the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), component parties of the ruling coalition. Local observers have predicted a significant decrease in support for MCA and MIC following disillusionment with the component parties within their respective ethnic communities. The Prime Minister stated that the two communities have to make a choice on whether "they want a louder voice in Parliament by voting the opposition or a bigger role in government by voting for MCA and MIC."

14. (SBU) In a last-minute campaign push, both MCA and MIC published advertisements in government-owned newspapers appealing to their respective communities to vote for their candidates "to secure your future." MIC's advertisement acknowledged that the party "made some mistakes" but appealed to voters to cast their ballots for BN "to ensure your rights and privileges are not eroded but secured and protected." MCA President Ong Ka Ting published a personal letter of appeal urging the voters not to "weaken the Chinese representation in the government."

PAS Puts Kelantan's Fate in God's Hands

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15. (SBU) In the tough fight for control over the state of Kelantan, pitting the incumbent Islamist opposition party PAS against UMNO, PAS has appealed to a higher authority. PAS held a special prayer ceremony at the Kelantan State stadium attended by around 20,000 supporters at 3:00 a.m. on March 7. Kelantan Chief Minister and party spiritual leader Nik Aziz led the prayers and sought divine intervention for the party to retain the state. According to the party's on-line newspaper, Nik Aziz became very emotional during the prayers. On the other side, Prime Minister Abdullah expressed confidence that BN "would win big" in Kelantan, and take control of the last state remaining in opposition hands. PM Abdullah and his deputy Najib Tun Razak each have visited Kelantan three times during the 13-day campaign period, symbolizing UMNO's heavy focus on winning the state.

Opposition Relies on Rallies

16. (SBU) During the campaign, opposition parties have received little coverage in the government-dominated mainstream media, particularly in the critical television media, and they lack resources to take out extensive advertising. Instead, opposition candidates have relied on political rallies or ceramahs, to make their appeal to voters. To date, police have not denied any permits to opposition parties to hold ceramahs, according to Embassy contacts within opposition parties. Poloffs have observed opposition party gatherings around the country that have drawn crowds of hundreds to thousands, usually depending on the drawing power of the speaker. Ceramahs featuring Peoples Justice Party (PKR) advisor Anwar Ibrahim or DAP leader Lim Kit Siang are guaranteed to attract a crowd of thousands. An Embassy observer attended a DAP ceramah on March 6 in Penang that attracted between 30,000 and 60,000 supporters.

BN Uses Its Media and Neighborhood Organizing

17. (SBU) With television new broadcasts featuring de facto campaign messages for the National Front coalition, and paid advertisements running on the air and in print, UMNO and other BN component parties have relied far less on "ceramahs" to woo voters. Embassy observers around the country have found that BN has held very few ceramahs. BN party workers have told poloffs, they prefer house to campaign as it has a personal touch with the voters especially through the "10 house system." Under the system, BN party volunteers are assigned ten houses each in a village or housing estate. The volunteers constantly keep in touch with the ten households, socialize with them, and on Election Day ensure they vote for the BN. Furthermore, party workers told poloffs that the government-owned media and newspapers "are also taking a care of the BN candidates." Embassy observers have seen little activity and few people at UMNO and other BN neighborhood campaign posts, compared with the active scenes at opposition party organizing points.

Tale of Two Ceramahs

18. (SBU) Embassy observation of two ceramahs in Kuala Lumpur the night of March 6 revealed the tremendous disparity in resources between the opposition and BN. PKR held a ceramah in a working-class Kuala Lumpur neighborhood on the grounds of a water-logged soccer field. Nevertheless, lead speaker Anwar Ibrahim attracted some 5,000 people to listen to an impassioned hour-long speech attacking BN corruption and employing jokes focusing on the personal weaknesses of UMNO leaders. The event featured a rudimentary sound system that repeatedly went dead, seemingly as attendees tripped over and disconnected the sole electric power cord.

19. (SBU) Across town, in an upscale shopping district, UMNO/BN held a ceramah headlined by DPM Najib. The event played out on a professionally built stage draped in huge canopies with a state-of-the-art sound system, live bands, and video screens showing campaign ads for the UMNO candidate, Women's Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil. Renowned Malaysian pop singer Siti Nurhaliza entertained the crowd and Malaysia's first astronaut/space traveler also took to the stage. As the multi-media extravaganza continued late into the night, Embassy observers departed before the program turned to any political speeches.

PAS Stops Buses Carrying Suspected "Phantom Voters"

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10. (SBU) Local media reported that PAS party workers stopped nine buses in Terengganu on March 7, claiming the passengers were "phantom voters" brought in to cast votes for BN (ref A). According to some press accounts, the chartered buses were carrying mainly female university students who had returned to the state to cast their votes. Terengganu police chief Ayub Yaakob stated police safely escorted the buses and the passengers to a state government building. PAS Election Director Mustafa Ali claimed that the nine buses were part of 190 buses and 2,000 cars that UMNO had engaged with one travel agency to ferry phantom voters to Terengganu and Kelantan to ensure a BN victory. He claimed that the phantom voters who will be arriving in the two east coast states include local and foreign students, and Indonesian and Burmese workers.

11. (SBU) In a related development, PAS Vice President Husam Musa stated that the party will not stop its party members from making "citizens arrests" of "phantom voters" in Kelantan on polling day. He also added that PAS will put up posters in the hotly-contested state to warn these illegitimate voters to be wary of their action as "Allah is watching everything."

Comment

¶12. (C) The months preceding Malaysia's 12th general election featured a series of large anti-government street protests, unusual for Malaysia, and rising discontent among ethnic minorities, particularly the Indian community. Nevertheless, the election campaign played out in a peaceful and orderly manner. Opposition voices have already begun to speak about protest actions in the event they lose races due to perceived fraud. Most concern centers around "phantom" voters shipped in by parties to assume other identities listed on the electoral roles and/or bused around to cast multiple, illegitimate votes to decide tight races. The Election Commission's last-minute decision, seemingly taken under government pressure, not to use indelible ink to mark voters' fingers has increased suspicions over election day trickery. One area we will watch closely is Kelantan. Protests of some kind would appear likely should PAS lose control of Kelantan, the last state under opposition rule, under circumstances of voter fraud.

KEITH